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ABSTRACT

First-year physical educators may abandon the goals promoted in teacher education programs and face "reality shock" in the workplace called school. This case study examines the perceptions of Mr. Miller, a beginning physical education teacher with no formal induction program available to him, and the effect of school culture on his teaching. Data collection methods included observation, formal interviews, informal discussion, and extensive field notes. Results suggest that: (1) like so many physical education teachers, Mr. Miller was allowed great autonomy within his subject area allowing him to adapt his teaching and curriculum; (2) he was deemed successful by the principal, colleagues, and even by himself on the basis of positive student response, but not necessarily on student achievement; (3) some workplace factors can be controlled, some cannot; (4) Mr. Miller's teaching schedule and the cultural norms of the school did not facilitate implementation of the curriculum and pedagogical methods he had learned during preservice teaching experiences. It is implied that had Mr. Miller been better prepared to deal with the realities of the school as a workplace as well as the micropolitics of school culture he might have been better prepared to confront school norms. (Contains 21 references.) (LL)

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"The Kids Just Love Him:"
A First Year Teacher's Perceptions
Of How The Workplace Has Affected His Teaching

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"The Kids Just Love Him:"

A First Year Teacher's Perceptions

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Introduction

There are many variables that affect how physical educators teach. Their knowledge, motivation, and level of preparedness are only a few. What is equally important is the surrounding social and organizational context, the workplace called the school.

In powerful ways, the workplace affects what is possible for teachers. That context, however, is not fixed and unalterable. Physical educators have some capacity to influence their workplace, and within certain limits, may act to change how environmental factors such as scheduling, equipment, and administrative relationships interact to shape their teaching. The ability to influence elements in the workplace may not be apparent to first year physical education teachers, however, and they may feel helpless in the face of organizational pressures.

In their first year, physical education teachers inherit most of the struggles that are common to the profession. They also encounter difficulties that are unique to their own induction year, to their particular

school, and to the subject of physical education (Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1990).

As novices move from being students in teacher education programs to teachers in schools, they may experience "reality shock" (Marso & Pigge, 1987; Ryan, Newman, Mager, Laslet, Flora, & Johnston, 1980). Their work situations may be vastly different from those in their preservice practicum settings. One consequence of such shock is the "wash-out effect," wherein what teachers learned in their teacher education programs is progressively eroded by school practice (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

Most new physical education teachers come from teacher education programs in which student learning is held to be one of the primary objectives for school instruction. First year teachers, however, often find an environment in schools where student learning in physical education is not a primary expectation of the administration, faculty, parents, students, or even the physical education teachers, themselves. There is evidence that suggests that not all teachers view student learning as an outcome of physical education (Placek, 1983). Instead, their objectives consist of keeping students "busy, happy, and good" in their classes (Placek, 1983).

Within the social context of the workplace, physical education teachers may receive subtle messages

about the role of physical education in the context of the school, including messages about student outcomes. As a result, first year physical education teachers may actually succumb to, and behave in ways which serve to maintain a set of workplace conditions that are not optimal for student learning. In that regard those workplace conditions are substantially inferior to those maintained for classroom academic subjects (Gitlin, 1983; Lawson, 1989). That is, first year physical education teachers may abandon the goals promoted in their teacher education programs in favor of goals that implicitly are more acceptable in the local context. The primary reason for this may be the "press" of workplace variables.

When regarding the school as a workplace, it is important to consider several contextual factors.

These are the characteristics of: the school, the school district, and the community. Variables in this investigation include the students, the teachers, the principal, as well as the "innerworkings," or the "culture of the school." The purpose of this study was to examine one first year physical education teacher's perceptions of how his workplace affected his teaching.

Information Gathering and Review

Data Collection

This case study was conducted using qualitative research methods. A first year physical education teacher, Mr. Miller, was observed for four months teaching classes, supervising recess periods, and eating lunch. He was also observed interacting informally with teachers and students in the halls, the main office, on the playground, as well as in the gymnasium. The observations took place from January to May, the second half of Mr. Miller's first year of teaching. Data collection included participant observation, formal interview, and informal discussion.

The principal, teachers, and students were also observed. After each observation and informal interview, extensive fieldnotes were recorded. All formal interviews with the physical education teacher were audiotaped and then transcribed. Data were analyzed and categorized according to their relationship to the purpose of the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted throughout the study. Field note and interview transcript data were sorted into categories representing major events in the experiences of the teacher. These categories were further analyzed for emergent themes. Preliminary themes developed in that manner provided the basis for

some of the interview questions, and observations during the later stages of the study. During the final phase of data collection, and after completion in May, the preliminary themes and the data were re-examined and reduced to form six major themes.

Strategies for confirming findings included member checking (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983) and negative case analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Patton, 1980). In addition, the investigator used recurrent themes and information to triangulate the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983)

Results

The results of this study are reported in two sections. The first provides description of the setting: the town, the school, the physical education program, and the physical education teacher. The second section includes the six themes that describe the physical educator's perceptions of how his workplace affected his teaching.

Description

Town of Mountainville. Mountainville is a small New England town. One of the largest mountains in the region is located there. The town looks like a postcard depicting a picturesque scene of old homes in a quaint New England setting. Mountainville has a population of approximately 11,000. Almost all of the

residents are white, and their economic status ranges from lower to upper middle-class.

Mountainville School District. The Mountainville school district includes one elementary school, a middle school, and is part of a regional high school. The elementary school is rather old, but has been recently renovated, and includes an addition that was built five years ago. All areas have been made accessible to the physically challenged.

There are approximately 400 students in grades K - 5 at Mountainville Elementary School. Almost all of the children are from white, middle class families. There are approximately four classes at each grade level, and between 18 and 23 students in each class. Eighty-three per cent of the faculty are women, and seventeen per cent are men. There are 20 classroom teachers, a physical education teacher, a music teacher, an art teacher, and a special education teacher.

Mountainville Elementary School Physical Education Program. All of the students take physical education. The physical educator teaches between six and nine classes per day, with approximately 18 - 23 students in each class.

The facilities for physical education include a gymnasium the size of one basketball court, which is also used as an auditorium. Outside, there is a field

directly adjacent to the school. It is approximately 50 yds. wide, and 75 yds. long, and is suitable for most outdoor physical education activities. There is also a sandy playground that includes very extensive wooden play structures.

A variety of equipment is available for physical education. There are the typical items such as playground balls, jump ropes, a parachute, etc. The only gymnastics equipment includes five or six tumbling mats. With the exception of the parachute, which is very old, all of the equipment is in good working order. During certain activities, however, there was not enough individual equipment. Soon after Mr. Miller was hired, he had the opportunity to purchase more equipment. He ordered individual manipulative items that he felt were necessary for the activities that he wanted to offer in his classes.

Mr. Miller had complete autonomy over his teaching and curriculum. There was no coordinator of physical education for his school, or the district. There was no curriculum guide. Depending upon the interests of the teacher and the students, activity units lasted approximately three weeks. Activities observed included: basic ball rolling skills, parachute activities, and running games at the primary level, and "New Games," floor hockey, and tee ball at the upper grade levels. Mr. Miller said that the most popular

activities in his program were soccer and basketball. He attributed the popularity of these two sports to the after school sports program, which fields school teams in these two sports.

Most of Mr. Miller's classes were organized in a similar fashion: introduction, warm-up, skill explanation and demonstration, skill practice, game, and class dismissal. (Not all of Mr. Miller's classes included skill practice or a game.) As a warm-up students usually jogged four or five minutes around the gymnasium. After warming up, they performed various stretches and worked on their sit-ups and push-ups. This warm-up took between 10 and 15 minutes, depending on the grade level.

During the stretching and strength training, many students performed the exercises in a cursory fashion, but there were some who took what they were doing very seriously, and put forth a valiant effort. Mr. Miller often tried to motivate them by walking around and providing corrective feedback.

When the warm-up was finished Mr. Miller explained and demonstrated the skills or activities for the next part of the lesson. Students were then set up for skill practice, or for a game. For example, during a floor hockey class, the students practiced passing and trapping the ball as the main activity for the entire

class period. In another class, the students played "New Games."

Most of the classes ended when Mr. Miller instructed the students to line up at the door when the period was over, or when the classroom teacher came to the door. On rare occasions Mr. Miller instructed the students to sit on the center circle, and he would have a closing discussion before dismissing the class. As the students went out the door, they gave Mr. Miller "high fives" (a very high, or jumping hand slap). The atmosphere in the gym was casual and happy.

Background of the Physical Education Teacher. Mr. Miller was 27 years old at the time that this study was conducted. He was born, brought up, and educated in the general area in which he taught.

Working on an ambulance for a year, and enjoying the study of human anatomy led him into physical education. He decided to become a teacher because there was a long history of teaching in his family. He also cited teaching as a temporary career choice. Mr. Miller would eventually like to own and operate his own sports club. He felt that it would be easier to go from a career in teaching to a career in management, rather than vice-versa. Here again, Mr. Miller is characteristic of other young male teachers; he intends to "move through teaching to other work" (Lortie, 1975, p. 88).

Perceptions of How the Workplace Affected His Teaching

Six workplace factors were identified as affecting how this first year teacher taught physical education. The three factors perceived by the teacher were: (a) scheduling of classes and non-teaching duties, (b) curriculum autonomy, and (c) outside of school professional development. In addition, three unarticulated factors (Schein, 1988) were identified by the researcher, and confirmed by the teacher. These factors included: (d) approval and acceptance by the principal and colleagues, (e) principal's and colleagues' perceptions of physical education, and (f) students' reactions.

Scheduling of Classes and Non-teaching Related Duties. Mr. Miller believed that his schedule was quite hectic. He reported,

> The number of classes that I have aren't [sic] really a big problem, but they're really congested a lot of times, and as soon as one class is leaving, another one's coming in. And just the transition time from one class to another wastes three or four minutes of one class's time. If the other class is slow to get in, or slow to get out, there goes five minutes time. So scheduling is not the best.

For the remainder of this school year, Mr. Miller said he would not ask the principal to change his schedule. He felt that when it was time to schedule physical education for next year he could approach his principal and request that his schedule be more balanced.

Mr. Miller viewed the scheduling of his classes and non-teaching duties as having a great affect on how he taught. He had to use class time to set up equipment, and he often designed his lessons so that almost all of his classes would use the same equipment all day. Often there was no formal closing activity or discussion at the end of a class. He felt that valuable class time would be wasted if each class did not enter and exit in a smooth, timely fashion. He did feel, however, that his principal was approachable, and that next year they could collaborate on creating a schedule that would accommodate his needs, as well as those of his students.

Curriculum Autonomy. As previously mentioned in the description of the physical education program, there was no district physical education coordinator, and no curriculum guide. Mr. Miller had complete autonomy over his teaching. Because Mr. Miller was able to control his program, he was able to change some of the conditions of his workplace. Originally, the

primary focus of his curriculum was skill acquisition. He was later influenced to emphasize fitness.

One of the factors that contributed to Mr. Miller's change in philosophy was his frustration over his inability to keep the students on task long enough so that he could see improvement in their skills. He explains,

> I was probably more into skill. [At the beginning of the year.] More trying to make sure that everybody improved on whatever they were doing. As far as the skills, I mean, it works doing just skill, but it's hard to get everybody [to improve]. I found that it was just too time consuming. It was just too frustrating to try and get everybody to, you know, to stay on task long enough to show improvement. ...So instead of beating myself over the head all of the time, I figure I'm just going to work on improving their fitness, and their flexibility, and things like that. Something that is easier to monitor.

Mr. Miller adapted his situation as many beginners are forced to do. Because he had no teaching colleagues, he was forced to solve his problems in the gymnasium by trial and error. He had no one from whom

to seek advice, or to share ideas. As a result, he relied on his students' reactions to his classes, and new ideas about teaching that he was presented with at a conference, to change his curriculum and teaching. His actions were typical of the beginning teachers mentioned in Lortie's (1975) studies, "The beginner's perceptions and interpersonal skills mediate between external advice and classroom events" (p. 73).

Mr. Miller felt that having the freedom to change the manner in which he conducted his classes was an important part of teaching at Mountainville Elementary School. This autonomy provided a means by which he could experience success in his teaching.

Outside Of School Professional Development. Mr. Miller was required to go to a number of in-service workshops at his school. He found that they were not, "real interesting or helpful." He learned that attending conferences, and talking with other physical education teachers were more beneficial than anything that was provided in school. He particularly cited the professional conference that he attended early in the school year (November, 1989) as most influencing his teaching.

During his brief tenure at Mountainville Elementary School, Mr. Miller requested two professional days to attend a conference and a workshop. In addition, he consulted the cooperating

teacher that he worked with during his student teaching. Mr. Miller perceived this teacher as being, "real helpful" because he provided him with information about specific units, or different games that he played that were appropriate for young children. He also was able to share ideas with another district physical education teacher during the lunch break of an in-service workshop.

Due to the lack of appropriate in-service training at Mountainville Elementary School, and the value that was realized from attending conferences and consulting other physical educators, Mr. Miller planned to seek outside of school professional development opportunities next year.

Approval and Acceptance by the Principal and Colleagues. "We just love Jim. He's great!" That was a comment from the principal at Mountainville Elementary School one day as she was casually talking to the researcher. Mr. Miller also perceived that the principal and the other teachers approved of him. He said, "They just love me here." There was no evidence that what Mr. Miller did in the gymnasium was criticized by anyone. Any comments that the researcher heard from any of the other teachers or the principal were only positive. Having the acceptance and approval of the principal and his colleagues reinforced the

curriculum and teaching strategies that Mr. Miller employed.

Principal's and Colleagues' Perceptions Of Physical Education. The principal had formally observed Mr. Miller's classes twice. The other teachers had only seen the action in the gymnasium when they walked by the door and looked in the windows, or when they brought their classes to and from the gymnasium. In response to a question asked about the expectations that the principal and his colleagues had of physical education Mr. Miller responded,

> ...they'll [the classroom teachers] come in and say, `Brother, brother, keep them all day!' So, I think it's like I'm a stress outlet for the kids. They come to me, get all their stress out, and hopefully, they're more relaxed in class.

Mr. Miller also mentioned that on occasion a teacher would bring the students to the gymnasium for class and say to him, "Run'em!" When asked if he thought that the other teachers expected that the children would learn anything in physical education, Mr. Miller said yes, he believed the teachers thought that some type of learning was going on,

> Certainly following directions, and things they do in every class, you know, basic sort of things, sportsmanship, learning about

themselves, and different sports and health-related issues, things like that.

As previously described, the students in Mr. Miller's classes were usually active, smiling, and appeared to be having a good time. To some this would appear to be an indication of a good physical education class. Keeping students busy, happy, and good (Placek, 1983) may have been the criteria by which Mr. Miller's teaching was being judged, thus serving, once again to reward his current style of teaching.

Students' Reactions. Mr. Miller perceived that the students liked him. He certainly liked them. His office was decorated with children's drawings. Students always greeted him in the halls. On the playground, there was a group of students who hung on to his arms, and followed him wherever he went. Mr. Miller even spent his twenty minute lunch period in the gymnasium eating, and playing games with his students. In his classes, the students appeared to have fun. It would have been almost impossible for these students not to have affected Mr. Miller's teaching.

While the students were not always quiet and listening when Mr. Miller was trying to present a lesson or give instructions, they did participate in the activities with great enthusiasm. Mr. Miller responded by including games and activities, such as

floor hockey and parachute activities, that were popular with the students. He also participated in the warm-up, as well as most class activities. The students appeared to like this, as they would try to sit or stand next to him, or tag him, etc. It was obvious that Mr. Miller enjoyed interacting with the children, and that they enjoyed his easy-going manner, and the kinds of activities that they did in his classes.

Reflecting on the notion of teacher rewards, it is obvious that the students' skill acquisition was not a source of reward for Mr. Miller. The students' positive interactions with him, in his classes and throughout the school, encouraged Mr. Miller to conduct his classes so that these rewards could be maximized. He provided a relaxed environment in the gymnasium, in which the students could interact with him, and each other, in a positive way.

From the previous discussion about Mr. Miller's perceived autonomy, and why he changed his philosophy of physical education, it is evident that he was being rewarded by his colleagues for keeping the children active in his classes. The students, themselves, were rewarding him by responding positively to the manner in which he conducted his lessons. Despite initial training, it appears that Mr. Miller's context served to reward a "busy, happy, and good" curriculum. To

satisfy his own sense of purpose, he added a fitness development goal. For this, there seemed to be no extrinsic motivation or reward.

Discussion

Mr. Miller is characteristic of many first year teachers in that no formal induction program was available to him. He was left alone to perform the same duties as a twenty year veteran (Lortie, 1975). Unlike the two first year elementary level physical education teachers in a study conducted by Mary O'Sullivan (1989), he did experience "reality shock." He had not anticipated his very rigorous schedule, and how that would affect his teaching.

He was pleasantly surprised, however, at how much autonomy he had over his work. Like so many other physical education teachers, Mr. Miller was allowed great autonomy within his subject area (Bain & Wendt, 1983; O'Sullivan, 1989; Templin, 1988). This autonomy allowed Mr. Miller to adapt his teaching and curriculum to facilitate, at least some degree of student learning in his program. Consequently, Mr. Miller was deemed successful by his principal, his colleagues, and even himself on the basis of positive student response, not necessarily on student achievement.

While Mr. Miller enjoyed his autonomy, he did not realize that it was a consequence of his isolation from

the main business of schooling. Inservice programs that were provided did not specifically address his needs, and he had to seek professional development opportunities outside the school. Unlike the first year teachers in O'Sullivan's study (1989), he was not provided with support that was specific to his needs. In essence, Mr. Miller paid for his autonomy with lack of professional stimulation and growth. Because of lack of support for his efforts to promote skill acquisition, he sought and implemented teaching practices that modified or replaced many of the teaching methods that he had learned in his teacher education program. As a result, Mr. Miller implemented a curriculum which emphasized physical fitness.

This "strategic adjustment," which is typical of first year teachers (Etheridge, 1989), was a response to his perceptions of work environment factors that were pressuring him. Mr. Miller believed that by changing his curriculum and teaching methods his students could, at least, improve their level of fitness, and in the process, "blow off some steam," so that they could concentrate better in their classrooms. Thus, he would reap the intrinsic rewards of seeing his students improve. Because his colleagues valued the high level of physical activity in his classes, he would also have their approval and acceptance. Furthermore, by abandoning his goal of skill

acquisition, he did not have to develop better methods toward that end.

While Mr. Miller perceived that scheduling, autonomy, and outside professional development strongly affected how he taught, the researcher was able to identify three elements within the school culture that were important influences on his teaching. These factors are embedded in a school culture which undervalues the "physical relative to its place within the school curriculum, and by association, the activities and status of physical education teachers" (Templin, 1988, p.80). Mr. Miller was different from the novices in O'Sullivan's study (1989) in that he did not recognize the marginality of physical education within the school's overall curriculum.

Implications

Several issues emerge from the data. First, the findings suggest that there are workplace factors that affect his teaching that Mr. Miller can control, and some that he cannot. Second, the nature of physical education as a subject influenced how he taught. Finally, a question: did Mr. Miller's undergraduate teacher preparation program adequately prepare him for his first year of teaching?

First, workplace factors that Mr. Miller could control included changing his teaching schedule, and

seeking outside of school professional development opportunities. He believed that changing his schedule would facilitate class preparation, and possibly allow him to incorporate "more skill work" into his curriculum. Mr. Miller was also committed to avoiding inservice workshops in the future. Instead, he was going to ask the principal to use that time to observe physical education teachers at other schools. This might accommodate his immediate need for information specific to teaching physical education. It would do very little, however, to demarginalize his subject, and his status as a teacher since he would not be spending time with classroom teachers in a setting which might allow them to change their views about learning in physical education.

Second, the nature of physical education as a subject would continue to negatively affect his program if he is not proactive in working to change the prevailing attitudes of the teachers, principal, students and parents within the school community. Mr. Miller will do very little to raise the status of his subject if he does not recognize its marginality within the school. As recommended by a principal in the Sparks, et al. study (1990), he should be visible, get involved, and have a voice in the work of the school. If he recognized a need to change prevailing views regarding learning in physical education, he might

attend inservice meetings if only to influence the classroom teachers.

It is conceivable that he could participate in school sponsored inservice training sessions, and continue to seek professional development related to physical education elsewhere for the present time. Mr. Miller would be able to accommodate his own needs, as well as be a visible, active member of the school community.

He might also take steps to insure that students and parents recognize that physical education is not simply for fun and fitness, but also for developing skills and understanding about a variety of movement activities. In this way he may be able to influence the norms of the culture inside and outside the school (Lawson, 1990; Schlechty, 1985), and work towards demarginalizing physical education as a subject, for himself, for his students, and for his community.

Third, as he confronted problems in his workplace, Mr. Miller perceived that what he learned in his teacher preparation program, particularly in his elementary practicum experience, did not work in his current situation. The data suggests that his teaching schedule, and the cultural norms of the school did not facilitate his implementing the curriculum and pedagogical methods that he was taught during his preservice experiences. The researcher believes that

he could have been better prepared to deal with the realities of the school as a workplace, and particularly, the micropolitics of the school culture.

Had his preparation been similar to that of the teachers in O'Sullivan's study (see Taggert, 1989) he might have been better able to implement effective teaching strategies, despite his workplace conditions. Had Mr. Miller's preparation also included a study of cultural phenomena (Goodlad, 1983), at least an awareness of the functioning of physical education within the larger cultural context, he might have been better prepared to confront school norms. He might have also been an advocate for the demarginalization of physical education as a subject.

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